

First Presbyterian Church
“The Story of God: Exodus”
Exodus 14:19-31, 1/30/2022

Today we’re talking about deliverance.

And, no, I don’t mean the bizarre 1972 film with Burt Reynolds
about four suburbanites who get lost
in the Appalachian Mountains...
(although those guys certainly needed
the kind of deliverance I *am* talking about!)

Today we we’re talking about the most fundamental story of deliverance
in the story of God that we know as “The Exodus.”

The way that God delivered Israel out of Egypt
is hugely important for how we understand the
story of God delivering us out of the crises
in our own lives.

But before we get there, let’s take a look at where we’ve been.

Looking back we start to see some trajectory
to the plot line of the Bible.

Remember that one of the purposes for this series
is that we all come away with a better understanding
of the basic plotline of the Bible,
and the other purpose is that we learn
how to tell our own stories in light of God’s story.

So in the beginning,

God creates the world to be a place of mutual blessing
and interdependence between humanity
and the other aspects of creation.

Unfortunately, humans try to take God’s job over
and the whole mutuality thing goes out the window.

But last week we saw that God does not give up on humanity,
instead, one family is chosen and God makes astounding promises
over several decades to an elderly couple
named Abram and Sarai whose names are later changed
to Abraham and Sarah.

The outcome of all these conversations
is that God promises a covenanted relationship
with them and their descendants.

- Their descendants will be very numerous—like the stars in the sky
- Their descendants will become a great nation
- Their descendants will inherit the land God is taking them to
- All families or people groups on earth will be blessed through them.

This sets out the basic framework for the whole rest of the Old Testament.

The questions the characters in the Bible always raise are,
“Will there be someone to keep the line of Abraham and Sarah going?”
“Will Israel be able to hold their own as a nation among other nations?”
“Will Israel fully inhabit the land God has given them,
and live in it the way God has commanded them?”

So anyway, God calls Abraham, and after a lot of hardship,
he and Sarah finally have a kid named Isaac,
and Isaac marries this beautiful shepherdess named Rebekah
and after a lot of hardship they have these twins
named Jacob and Easau who don’t get along real well.

Jacob steals Esau’s birthright, so the promises of God pass on to him,
and he ends up having 12 sons in the most
dysfunctional family set up you can imagine.

Even so, these 12 sons become the foundation for the 12 tribes of Israel.
And one of them, named Joseph goes from rags to riches in Egypt,
and in the end the whole family follows him down there.

And that family grows into a huge people
known as the Hebrews which means “outsiders.”

Even though they have this heritage of God’s promises,
they find themselves in Egypt without a leader
and without land of their own,
and over time they become the slaves of the Egyptian people.
They are outsiders, Hebrews.

For 400 years they are slaves in Egypt,
and over time the abuse put on these people becomes greater
and greater.

So it's in this setting that God does raise up a leader for Israel.
A man named Moses.

And Moses is charged with leading this people
out of Egypt and into the promised land.
But Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt refuses,
and so God sends 10 plagues on Egypt
culminating in the death of every firstborn child
because Pharaoh would not,
in the famous words of Charlton Heston,
“Let my people go!”

In the passage we read today,
God saves the people of Israel from Pharaoh's army
by instructing Moses to raise his staff—
the sign that he had the authority of God—
and parting the waters with a great wind
so that the people walked to safety on dry land.

This act of deliverance becomes the primary way in which Israel
defines the character of God.
Yahweh is the God of creation, and he's the God of Abraham,
and he's the God who delivered Israel out of Egypt.

God is *characteristically* revealed to us in the story of God,
in the Bible, as a God who delivers people.
The exodus of Israel from Egypt is the most important one
in *Israel's* memory,
but God is constantly delivering people,
often performing exodus events
that we don't hear about.

Don't believe me? Listen to this line from Amos chapter 9:7:
“Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?”
says the Lord. “Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Caphtor
and the Arameans from Kir?”

What a fascinating line this is—
while Israel knows primarily of their own Exodus,
God reminds them through Amos that
they aren't the only ones he's helped out over the years.

Amos casually throws out three other nations
that God has delivered out of trouble in their own Exodus stories—
Ethiopia, Philistia, and Aramea.

Now that sounds pretty good, but there's a flip side to it.

Being people God has delivered also means that we were slaves,
whether literally or figuratively, for some portion of our lives,
if not for our whole lives.

I wonder how you tell your own story of slavery?

I don't know all of your stories, but I do know people.

And I know that I'm not alone in having a chapter
or two (or three) that I wish had never been written in my life.

But I'm here to tell you that whatever the pain or dirt in your life,
whether it's something in your past or something in your present,
or something that you encounter later in life,
God is not afraid of messed up people
or messed up families or messed up situations.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, God is able to deliver you out of that,
and that deliverance will result in a *new creation* in your life.

That language of new creation
is something we find explicitly in today's text.

I want to focus for a few minutes on verses 20-22 of chapter 14.

What I want to show you is that the story of
Israel's deliverance is told in a way
that casts it in the light of the first creation story.

Thus the Exodus becomes an act of *new creation*.

Commentator Goran Larsson says

**“In the miracle at the sea we recognize the features
of the creator of the world in the savior of Israel.”**

In Genesis, God separates light from darkness.

In the Exodus, the pillar of fire and pillar of smoke do the same thing.

In Genesis, God's Spirit (or wind) gathers the waters so dry ground appears.

In Exodus God parts the waters with a mighty wind
so Israel can walk on dry ground.

By making this connection, the author of the book of Exodus is
making sure that *we are following the plot line*
of the story of God here—
the very God who created the heavens and the earth
is the God who has saved you
from the hand of the Egyptians.

I like to think that when Israel passes through the waters
it's like a great communal baptism in which each person
enters the waters by faith and emerges
from the waters with a new identity,
a new purpose,
a new way of understanding
their relationship to God.

They have experienced the creative power of God all over again.
This is God bringing his people back into the garden of Eden.
This is the birthing of the people of Living God
who inherit the promises made to their ancestors
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The result of this is that God is proclaiming to Israel—
“You are not a slave people anymore. That is not your identity.
You are no longer in bondage to that identity,
it is a thing of the past because you belong to me
and in this deliverance I declare a new creation
has come about in you.”

And I ask each one of you, do you hear God proclaiming that to you?

I do think we all need our own personal exodus, our own new creation.
But we also must remember that the Exodus account we read today
is one of *real slaves* and *real captors*.

This is a real geopolitical situation in which ethnic minorities
are being abused at the hands of rich
and powerful political oppressors.

That's the story of Israel and Egypt.

You see, God is not limited to one side or the other.

Walter Brueggemann writes this: **“We must not argue, in my judgment,
that deliverance is material rather than spiritual,
or that salvation is spiritual rather than material.
Either side of such a dualism distorts true human bondage
and mis-reads Israel’s text,
which well understood the larger, mythic component
of human bondage.
The issue for the Bible, in both Testaments,
is not one of either/or but of both/and.”** End quote.

The Exodus was a salvation moment,
but if we don’t embrace that salvation as a lived reality,
we will reenact the horrors of the Hebrew people’s experience.

Let’s not neglect to see the Exodus still sought by
Jews who face antisemitism around the world and here in the US.
Holocaust Remembrance Day was on Jan. 27th,
and it serves a dual purpose of both remembering and preventing
antisemitism.

Let’s not neglect to see the abolition of slavery in the United States
as an act of God that freed people who were and are God’s children,
and let us not neglect seeing that work to completion today
through antiracism in the church.

Let us not neglect to ask God to deliver the Uyghurs in China.
If you watch the Beijing Olympics, pray for the Uyghurs.
They are enduring unspeakable atrocities as we speak.

There is a line from the Jewish Passover rite,
which of course commemorates the first exodus,
that is still used today in synagogues around the world.
The priest tells the congregation:
“In every generation it is everyone’s duty to look upon himself
as if he came out of Egypt,
as it is said [quoting from Exodus 13:8]:
‘And you shall tell your son’s children on that day:
It is because of what the Lord did for me
when I came out of Egypt’”. (REPEAT)